To Live Like a Pig and Die Like a Dog: Environmental Implications for World War I in East Africa

A Monograph
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This monograph examines why Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces in East Africa during World War I despite their significant advantages in personnel and material. Great Britain proved unable to subjugate German forces because of the British failure to account for and adapt to the effects of the local environment. The British failure to adapt their organizations and methods of warfare to accommodate the imperatives of the environment provided the German forces with multiple opportunities to continue their struggle. The Germans capitalized upon those opportunities thereby prolonging World War I in East Africa.

The methodology utilized involves analyzing the key factors that characterized pre-colonial African warfare and assessing how the environment influenced the development of these distinguishing factors. The British failed to act in accordance with these distinguishing factors which resulted in diminished success. The findings of this study illustrate the importance of reconciling the conduct of military operations with environmental influences and constraints.

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Abstract

TO LIVE LIKE A PIG AND DIE LIKE A DOG: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS FOR WORLD WAR I IN EAST AFRICA by Major Chad B. Quayle, USA, 54 pages.

This monograph examines why Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces in East Africa during World War I despite their significant advantages in personnel and material. Great Britain proved unable to subjugate German forces because of the British failure to account for and adapt to the effects of the local environment. The British failure to adapt their organizations and methods of warfare to accommodate the imperatives of the environment provided the German forces with multiple opportunities to continue their struggle. The Germans capitalized upon those opportunities thereby prolonging World War I in East Africa.

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Introduction

World War I in Africa, for those who did not fight or live there, was largely considered a theater of minor importance. For those who did live in Africa, both colonial Europeans and Africans, it was anything but insignificant. In Africa, the suffering resulting from the Great War differed in kind but hardly in degree from the suffering in Europe; some soldiers arriving from Europe expressed the belief that they were better off in the trenches of Flanders.[1] World War I in Africa, as Sergeant Daniel Fewster succinctly surmised in the postscript to his journal (see Appendix I), was a completely different kind of war from that fought in Europe.[2] Just as the stresses resulting from World War I changed European societies forever, the conflict likewise changed the very nature of society in Africa. Germany lost her empire. The Allied powers, while preserving or expanding their African empires for the time being, effectively sowed the seeds of their own imperial destruction as notions regarding African independence started to emerge. According to Hew Strachan, "for the local Africans, the suffering and social dislocation that resulted from World War I was enormous; arguably only the legacy of the slave trade produced more adverse consequences for the African population."[3] World War I in Africa may have been considered unimportant when viewed from London or Berlin, but things looked differently from Nairobi or Dar-es-Salaam. For those in Africa, World War I was not a sideshow. It was the only show in town.

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[1] "A 25th Fusilier expressed the sentiments of many when he said, 'Ah, I wish to hell I was in France! There one lives like a gentleman and dies like a man. Here one lives like a pig and dies like a dog.'" Byron Farwell, *The Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 294.

[2] Sergeant Joseph Daniel Fewster, who served with the British Army in both France and East Africa, describes the differences between World War I on the western front and World War I in Africa in the postscript to his journal. Sergeant Fewster's postscript is enclosed in Appendix I.

[3] Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), viii.

The sustained combat in East Africa constituted the longest campaign in any theater during World War I.[4] Beginning on August 8, 1914 and concluding on November 13, 1918, two days after the armistice ended the fighting in Europe, combatants fought across over 800,000 square miles of terrain that now encompasses much of Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia. For over four years and three months, more than 100,000 Allied forces pursued the German Schütztruppen, which never numbered greater than 15,000 combatants, over a distance of 3000 miles.[5] The German commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, successfully waged war for over four years against the greatest imperial power of the age. He was never captured or defeated, and his surrender only followed Germany's capitulation. In Africa a different type of warfare emerged, one characterized by mobility, small unit engagements, and logistical nightmares. While most often considered a distraction of minor importance in the greater context of World War I, the African theater of operations exhibited challenges and complexity that tested the mettle of those unfortunate enough to become engulfed in the African maelstrom.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine why Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces in East Africa during World War I despite their significant material superiority. Great Britain seemingly held decisive advantages including greater numbers of troops, more robust logistics, and unchallenged control of the sea lines of communications. According to conventional thought, these benefits should have tendered decisive military results. Despite these advantages, Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces because they failed to account for and adapt to the effects of the local environment. Most of the

[4] The historical literature consistently refers to World War I in British East Africa, German East Africa, Portuguese East Africa, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, and the area around Lake Tanganyika as "the East African Campaign." This monograph utilizes the terms "East African Campaign" or simply "campaign" in this general context for the sake of continuity.

[5] Schütztruppen – protection forces, German colonial troops.

historical literature focuses on von Lettow-Vorbeck and the German successes; the inability of the Allied forces to decisively defeat their German opponents has received less scrutiny. This monograph will fill this gap.

World War I constitutes one of the most studied events in history, generating a body of literature that almost defies imagination in both its quantity and scope. Beginning immediately after the conclusion of hostilities, authors from virtually every major belligerent nation produced historical works in varying quantities. Most of these histories focused overwhelmingly on the western front. The eastern front, Asia Minor, the Middle East, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa received relatively little emphasis. In the immediate aftermath of the war, many of the participants published personal recollections of their experiences but it was not until the 1930s that major historical works appeared.

B.H. Liddell-Hart's *The Real War* (1930) and C.R.M.F. Cruttwell's *A History of the Great War* (1934) emerged as the two leading histories of World War I. These two works established a historical tradition that significantly influenced the academic historical study of this period. Both works focused primarily on the western front and their perspective demonstrated a decidedly British predisposition. Cruttwell's work emphasized the military aspects of the conflict with, according to Liddell-Hart's calculations, only 16 per cent of his book dedicated to non-military aspects.[6]

The military focused, Anglo-centric trend in historical scholarship within the English speaking world continued to prevail until well into the late twentieth century. Oxford University Press commissioned Hew Strachan to produce a one-volume replacement for C.R.M.F. Cruttwell's *A History of the Great War*, which resulted in the publication in 2001 of *World War I, Volume 1, To Arms*, the first volume in what evolved into a projected three-volume series. The sixty-seven year gap between the Cruttwell's work and the publication of an updated history of

[6] Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xv.

comparable scope bears testimony to Cruttwell's enduring impact and influence upon the historical interpretation of World War I.

While Liddell-Hart and Cruttwell attempted to establish an objective, detached, scholarly interpretation of World War I that focused on the European theaters of operations, no scholarly work of similar enduring quality emerged that focused on operations in sub-Saharan Africa. This void in the scholarly literature seems particularly pronounced given the comparatively extensive coverage in the popular media. Both *The African Queen* (1951) and *Out of Africa* (1985) utilized Africa during World War I as a scenic backdrop within the cinematic genre. Popular histories regarding military operations in East Africa during World War I proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, the Great War in Africa has, until quite recently, been largely neglected within the academic literature.

Both during World War I and in the years following, participants in the campaign recorded accounts of their experiences in East Africa. Francis Young's *Marching on Tanga: With General Smuts in East Africa* (1917), Richard Meinertzhagen's *Army Diary 1899-1926* (1960), and General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (1920) constitute some of the most notable works authored during this period. Young's experience while serving as a captain in the British medical corps provides a primary account of his experiences with Allied forces. Meinertzhagen, controversial and frequently accused of embellishment, nevertheless provides a unique perspective as the primary British intelligence officer up until his departure in 1916. Von Lettow-Vorbeck's memoirs provide a detailed and reasonably objective account from the perspective of the German commander. While without question useful, these and other similar accounts embody a necessarily biased perspective of events. Whether due to limited perspective because of position or whether as a result of the inevitable personal bias, memoirs from participants fail to provide an objective, detached analysis of events. After the publication of these initial works, many decades passed before academia demonstrated any noticeable interest in the subject. The popular histories that emerged during the 1960s and the 1970s tended to

romanticize certain aspects of the war while largely ignoring or treating in superficial fashion the suffering and adversity that resulted from the war in Africa. It was not until the 1980s that World War I in Africa began to receive increased scholarly attention.

Geoffrey Hodges' *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (1986) and Byron Farwell's *The Great War in Africa* (1986) constituted some of the first attempts to move beyond popular history when examining World War I in East Africa. These two works provided coherent analysis pertaining to the conflict in Africa that went beyond what had become the norm in the previous popular histories. By providing coherent narrative and expanding the field of study to include actors outside of European military formations, Hodges and Farwell marked a notable step forward from previous studies.

In 2001, Hew Strachan published his comprehensive volume *The First World War, Volume I, To Arms*, which included a chapter that provided extensive scholarly examination of the war in Africa. In 2004, this chapter was updated and published as a separate book under the title *The First World War in Africa*. This marked the beginning of significantly more extensive examination of World War I in Africa within the academy. Ross Anderson, one of Strachan's protégés, wrote the *Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-1918* in 2004, which built upon Strachan's initial analysis. Edward Paice's 2008 work *World War I: The African Front* constitutes the most recent contribution to this field of study. The recent works by Strachan, Anderson, and Paice constitute significant steps forward for the scholarly examination of these events.

While the body of scholarly literature regarding World War I in Africa continues to grow, there remains a considerable void in the literature particularly when judged against the body of academic work for World War I as a whole. Only within the past several years have academic works examining World War I in Africa begun to emerge with any regularity. Having reviewed the academic literature regarding the subject, an overview of the African terrain and history

constitutes the next logical step in developing an understanding of the environment in which the East African campaign of World War I took place.

Section 1 – East Africa Terrain and Historical Background

Understanding the terrain constitutes a prerequisite for comprehending the war in East Africa. Geographically the area is enormous, encompassing the present countries of Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia. East Africa consists of four distinct geographical zones: the seaboard, coastal lowlands, the central plateau, and the highlands. The seaboard constitutes the area immediately adjacent to the coastline. The coastal belt constitutes a narrow band around Mombasa and Tanga in the north and expands significantly in the basins of the Rufiji and Ruvuma rivers, ultimately spreading far inland.[7] Characterized by high temperatures and humidity, the coastal belt presents an inhospitable and unhealthy environment for those people and animals not indigenous to the region. Malaria constitutes a constant threat throughout the area. As the costal belt transitions to the central plateau, conditions become more hospitable. At over 3000 feet, the central plateau records higher daytime temperatures but the nights are comparatively cool. As one approaches the frontier between German East Africa and British East Africa, the central plateau gives way to the highlands. Kilimanjaro at 19,710 feet, Mount Kenya at 16,798 feet, and Ruwenzori at 16,790 feet constitute the prominent geographic features with continuous snow and ice. Further down towards the central plateau the Ukinga, Poroto, Pare, and Usambara mountains, though much smaller, catch the monsoons coming off the Indian Ocean between April and October resulting in heavy precipitation.[8]

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[7] Charles Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa: August 1914 - September 1916. Vol. I* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1941), 12.

[8] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 13.

Vegetation throughout the East African theater of operations varies enormously and significantly affected military operations. In the south swamps and tropical vegetation impeded mobility. Similar vegetation existed near the shores of lakes and streams throughout East Africa. In the north, vast expanses of arid wasteland punctuated by thorns created obstacles to the movement of large formations. Across the plains, open grasslands constituted the defining feature. Throughout the East Africa, population density remained sparse with isolated villages and hamlets dotting the landscape.

Transportation and logistics constitute an enduring problem on the African continent due to the absence of dependable lines of communication. The rivers of Africa are peculiarly unsuited for transportation, as many are closed by rapids or are navigable for part of the year only.[9] The existing network of roads was scarcely any better. Political scientist Jeffrey Herbst notes that "the colonialists essentially built the minimum number of roads necessary to rule given the Berlin rules… most of the road building under white rule was concentrated around the capital and efforts were not made to consolidate far-flung populations."[10] The lack of developed roads placed serious limitations on the use of motorized transport. Diseases spread by the tsetse fly effectively prohibited the use of draft animals in many regions of East Africa, thereby requiring either foraging or the use of human porters to enable even the most basic logistics systems.

Disease constituted a defining factor for the campaign in East Africa. Throughout the campaign in East Africa, mortality rates from disease far exceeded the casualties from combat. The Anopheles mosquito transmitted malaria, the single greatest killer during the campaign. The tsetse fly spread sleeping sickness among humans and devastated horses and cattle with nagana

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[9] A.G. Boycott, *The Elements of Imperial Defence: A Study of the Geographical Features, Material Resources, Communications & Organization of the British Empire* (London: Gale & Polden Limited, 1939), 237.

[10] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 167.

(the animal equivalent to human sleeping sickness) thus rendering entire swaths of countryside impassible to beasts of burden. Fleas, ticks, termites, scorpions, centipedes, spiders, bees, and warrior ants all combined to spread disease and make existence in eastern Africa a singularly miserable and unhealthy experience.

Historically the "scramble for Africa" and the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 constitute the antecedents that provide necessary context for World War I in Africa.[11] The "scramble for Africa" refers to the period of European colonial expansion in the last part of the nineteenth century. While not strictly punctuated in time and lacking consensus among historians, this monograph utilizes the dates advocated by Thomas Pakenham that define the "scramble for Africa" as the period from 1876 until 1912. Africa constituted an almost unknown expanse in the late 1870s. With the exception of a few intrepid explorers, no westerners had penetrated beyond a handful of isolated trading posts along the coasts. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century only Liberia and Ethiopia, comprising less than four percent of the African continent, remained free from European colonial domination (see Appendix II, Figure 1).[12] The competition for land, resources, and political influence throughout the region pitted the western nations against each other, while in a broader context the subjugation of the African population by Europeans constituted a defining characteristic of the age. The jealousies and nationalistic notions of competition that contributed to World War I in many respects had their genesis in the "scramble for Africa." As noted by Hew Strachan, "although fought between European powers for objectives that were also European, the African campaigns of the First World War bore more

[11] The Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902, sometimes referred to simply as "The Boer War," was actually the second war fought between British forces and the independent Boer Republics (Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic). The first war between the British and the Boers took place in 1880-1881 and was initiated by British attempts to annex the Transvaal . The Boers succeeded in resisting this British action; the Transvaal Republic remained independent.

[12] Anthony Nutting, *Scramble for Africa: The Great Trek to the Boer War* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1970), 15.

relationship to the nineteenth-century campaigns of colonial conquest than they did to the Great War itself."[13]

If "the scramble for Africa" provided the greater political context for the Great War's campaign in East Africa, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 foreshadowed many of the strategic, operational, and tactical aspects of the impending calamity that would become World War I in Africa. Strategically, the Union of South Africa would harbor geopolitical goals that contrasted starkly with Great Britain's more limited aims. Operationally, the number of troops the Allies would employ relative to the inferior numerical strength of the enemy demonstrates an eerie similarity to the large number of British forces required to subjugate the Boer forces at the turn of the twentieth century. Tactically, the campaign in East Africa would exhibit in varying degrees the guerilla warfare, scorched earth tactics, disease, and endemic indifference towards the African populations that emerged during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. All of these proliferated in an unabated fashion during the East African Campaign. For many of the British officers the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 constituted a defining experience that continued to color their thoughts a decade and a half later. Many of the passions and rivalries that dominated that conflict once again became contentious.

The Boers, farmers who descended from Dutch settlers who arrived in 1652, rose in rebellion against the British in 1899.[14] Having acquired the South African colonies from Holland during the Napoleonic Wars in 1806, the British had a longstanding and strained relationship with the Boer population.[15] Beginning in 1834, Boer settlers began moving north to the area between the Orange and Vaal rivers. This area later became the Orange Free State. Some of the settlers

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[13] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 12.

[14] "Boer" is the Dutch word for farmer. The term "Boer" and "Afrikaner" are frequently used interchangeably although "Afrikaner" specifically refers to the white Afrikaans-speaking people of South Africa and not to a specific occupation.

[15] Field Marshal Lord Carver. *The National Army Museum Book of The Boer War* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1999), 1.

crossed the Vaal River and formed the Transvaal Republic. During this Boer migration, some settlers moved into Natal. The British, not wanting the Boers to dominate this area, annexed Natal in 1843.[16]

The fundamental conflict between the British and the Boers resulted from the Boers' determination to remain independent, an aspiration that conflicted with British imperial ambitions. In December 1880, Paul Kruger was elected president and declared independence for the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State. On February 26, 1881, Boer forces attacked the British killing 96, wounding 132, and capturing 56.[17] In less than a week, the British and the Boers signed an armistice that resulted in the British garrisons in the Transvaal Republic being removed. The agreement, dubbed the Convention of Pretoria, proved insufficient to maintain a long-term peace. The discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 and a succession of staunch imperialists as governors of the Cape Colony scuttled the possibilities for long-term peace.[18] The influx of British subjects into the Transvaal as a result of the ensuing gold rush threatened to dilute Boer power, and thus set the conditions for the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902.[19]

The Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 influenced British ideas and opinions in a number of significant ways. Strategically, it highlighted the physical shortcomings of many of the British recruits now coming from the rapidly growing urban class. Smaller and less healthy than previous generations, the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 highlighted the disparity between British soldiers and the Boer farmers who proved healthier and physically more robust. Additionally, at the tactical level, the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 came to embody the British idea of guerilla warfare, particularly as applied on the African continent. The Boer

[16] Ibid, 2.

[17] Ibid, 3.

[18] Ibid, 7.

[19] Ibid, 8.

farmers extracted a heavy price on British forces even though they were ultimately defeated. Consequently, the Boers established the example in the British consciousness for how to wage war in Africa. During the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902, the British also implemented the use of concentration camps. The British use of concentration camps resulted in horrendous casualties among Boer women and children and thereby adversely affected British public opinion regarding the war in South Africa. The Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 constituted the first major British military engagement since the implementation of major educational reforms in the 1870s that resulted in widespread literacy.[20] Consequently, the British population, for the first time, demonstrated a widespread capability to understand what was reported and to subsequently influence British politics. The combined influences of the "scramble for Africa" and the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 contributed significantly to the state of affairs that existed in East Africa in the summer of 1914.

Germany possessed four colonies in Africa when war broke out in August 1914. Shortly after the commencement of hostilities, the British invaded Togoland in order to seize the most powerful German radio transmitter on the continent.[21] Togoland, located in what is now Togo and Ghana in western Africa, constituted the smallest of the German colonies and demonstrated resistance for less than a month before British and French forces occupied the territory. Germany successfully defended her colony in the Cameroons (part of modern Nigeria and Cameroon) by defending inland until February 1916. The French and British, after invading the Cameroons found themselves engaged in a two year struggle to subjugate German forces after the Allies missed the opportunity to destroy the German forces early on. This struggle affected the East African Campaign because once the Germans surrendered in the Cameroons the British then had

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[20] Kenneth Morgan, *The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)*. (Twentieth Century British History, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2002) 2.

[21] Germany relied on high powered radio transmitters to communicate between Germany and the colonies. This contrasts with British reliance upon undersea cables to facilitate such communication.

significantly greater numbers of Nigerian and Gold Coast soldiers available for redeployment to East Africa. These greater numbers changed the operational calculus in the East African Campaign. Upon capitulation of German forces in the Cameroons, the British and French forces occupied and administered the region. German Southwest Africa (present day Namibia) surrendered in July 1915 after British forces granted terms that allowed German reservists to return to their homes and guaranteed that the German civil administration would remain in place.[22] The fight in German Southwest Africa persisted until the summer of 1915 and essentially remained a struggle between the Germans and South African forces commanded by Louis Botha. For South Africa, the prospect of seizing German Southwest Africa and increasing its dominion across southern Africa constituted a primary political goal. Despite the European nature of the conflict, the Europeans realized that within the context of Africa, maintaining European supremacy over the African population remained paramount. This realization on the part of both the Germans and the British facilitated the capitulation of German Southwest Africa under rather amicable terms.

The fourth German colony, German East Africa, proved distinctly different from the other German colonies. In East Africa, a different sort of fight emerged largely due to the differences regarding the objectives of the respective British and German authorities. Several different factors influenced the British government's overarching objectives as they pertained to East Africa. Anne Samson states, "British East Africa's importance lay in the fact that it gave Britain access to the interior via a route other than Egypt. This was believed necessary to protect British interests in the source of the Nile, hence ensuring the safety of Egypt, the Mediterranean and Suez Canal while ultimately protecting the trade route to India."[23] German East Africa in

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[22] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 92.

[23] Anne Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign, 1914-1918: The Union Comes of Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 28.

particular, "formed the missing link in Britain possessing territory across the length of Africa, while ensuring for Germany a continuous line of possessions across the African continent, provided that it gained part of the Belgian Congo."[24] The importance of Zanzibar as a British naval base and the potential use of Dar-es-Salaam by the Germans contributed to British perceptions regarding the importance of East Africa. Dar-es-Salaam could serve as a coaling station for German cruisers that would threaten British shipping lanes from India. Its wireless communications facilities also enabled the Germans to potentially coordinate naval actions directed against those same shipping lanes. Furthermore, for the British, Zanzibar "was an important link in the underwater telegraph cable network between Britain and the Empire. A cable ran from Aden across to Zanzibar and then down to Durban in South Africa and for this reason, the military officials had felt a need in previous years to provide special protection to areas where underwater cables surfaced."[25]

In addition, at the outbreak of war in 1914, the British had two other strategic concerns that pertained to Africa. First, the German radio transmitter located at Kamina, Togoland, needed to be neutralized in order to prevent communications between Germany and her naval fleet. As Lieutenant Colonel Charles Hordern states in the official account *Military Operations in East Africa*, "the Germans, lacking submarine cables, relied largely on powerful wireless stations in their colonies to send orders to their warships and warnings to their merchant ships enabling the latter to avoid capture. The sub-committee's choice of objectives was therefore mainly influenced by the question whether these possessed wireless stations and harbours."[26] The second strategic

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[24] CAB 38/4/9, 23 Feb 1904 – Secret 20A – '1. The military resources of Germany and probable method of their employment in a major war between Germany and England. 2. Policy to be adopted in a war with Germany' by Intelligence Dept, WO; Memorandum dated 10 Feb by EA Altham, AQMG (p8) put to the CID in 1904. Quoted in Anne Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign, 1914-1918: The Union Comes of Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 196.

[25] Samson, *Union Comes of Age*, 23.

[26] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 64.

concern involved the elimination of naval bases and any German cruisers that might prey upon British shipping traveling between Great Britain and India. The German cruiser *Königsberg* slipped out of her home port of Dar-es-Salaam just before hostilities commenced. Hunted by the British Royal Navy, she ultimately sought refuge in the Rufiji Delta. Eventually located and sunk by British naval forces, her destruction effectively removed the last strategic concern for the British in Africa.

When the war began, Germany's strategy regarding German East Africa lacked coherence due to tensions between the civil and military authorities. Some within the German government, to include the Governor of German East Africa, Dr. Heinrich Schnee, advocated the pursuit of neutrality in an effort to protect the gains made by the colony over the previous thirty years.[27] Additionally, many colonists remained quite fearful of uprisings by the Africans and argued that consolidation of their positions (and the positions of Europeans in general) should constitute the highest priority for the colonial government. Others, to include the German General Staff and the Commander of the Schütztruppen, Lieutenant Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, viewed neutrality as construing a marked advantage to Great Britain and advocated the full prosecution of the war within Africa. They asserted that by prosecuting the war vigorously in Africa, needed British men and materiel that might otherwise find their way to the battlefields of Europe would in fact remain engaged in the colonies. In any case, there was no doubt by anyone that the fate of the colonies would largely result from the outcome on European battlefields.[28]

The Schützruppen commander's views regarding strategy and objectives soon prevailed. Von Lettow-Vorbeck's objective for the Germans in East Africa was clear: force Great Britain and her allies to devote resources to Africa that might otherwise have been utilized on the

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[27] The Congo Act, ratified by the Treaty of Berlin in 1885, allowed any power within the Congo basin to declare itself neutral. Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 92.

[28] Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (Uckfield, East Sussex: The Naval and Military Press Limited, 2004), 3.

battlefields of Europe. Although the methods that von Lettow-Vorbeck utilized to achieve his aims changed over time, his strategy remained consistent throughout the war. From the time the war began until early 1916, the Germans engaged in conventional warfare with company-sized units. By March 1916, German forces faced significant challenges as the British considerably increased their combat forces. The resulting numerical disparity between German and British forces allowed the British to conduct significant offensive operations against German East Africa. The Germans responded by withdrawing to the interior, utilizing positional defenses, conducting small-scale attacks, and adapting to "bush warfare." Von Lettow-Vorbeck sought to attrit the British forces to the greatest extent possible while preserving his own combat power. By November 1917, after British forces pursued their German adversaries for over 600 miles, Lettow-Vorbeck changed his methods once again in order to preserve his force. At this time, he focused on the survival of his force and directed his efforts against Portuguese East Africa in an effort to acquire supplies. Von Lettow-Vorbeck succeeded in preserving his force, ultimately surrendering in Abercorn, Northern Rhodesia, on November 25, 1918, two weeks after the signing of the Armistice that ended World War I in Europe.

Several factors contributed to the British failure to decisively defeat von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Schütztruppen. The lack of political cohesion that resulted from the conflicting political goals between the British and the South Africans, the ever changing multitude of British commanders, and the negative effects of pervasive racism among British forces all contributed to the inability of the British to achieve a decisive victory. The primary reason that the British were unable to defeat the Schützstruppen, however, resulted from their reluctance to acknowledge the extent to which the environment affected their overall campaign. They tried to fight a British war in the British way as opposed to fighting an African war in the African way. Their failure to adapt their methods of warfare and organization to accommodate the imperatives of the environment provided the German Schützstruppen with multiple opportunities to continue their struggle. The

Germans took those opportunities and capitalized upon them, to the detriment of Great Britain and her allies.

In an effort to determine why Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces in East Africa during World War I despite their significant material advantages, this analysis will examine the key factors that characterized pre-colonial African warfare and how the environment influenced the development of these methods. Understanding why warfare evolved in the way it did in Africa prior to the arrival of the Europeans will facilitate a greater appreciation of the environmental factors and how they affected military operations in the African context. The subsequent section addresses the development of those factors that characterized traditional African warfare prior to European colonization.

Section 2 – Traditional African Warfare

Warfare in pre-colonial Africa varied, sometimes significantly, from location to location across sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, several characteristics of pre-colonial warfare demonstrated noticeable consistency across diverse tribes and cultures within Africa. This consistency resulted from the evolution of African warfare within the context of the local environment. The role of the environment, particularly the elements comprising demographics, terrain, weather, and disease, influenced considerably how the Africans fought. Understanding how the environment affected the practice of pre-colonial warfare among the African tribes provides an alternate perspective through which to analyze the performance of the European powers in Africa during World War I. This analysis will illustrate that the Allied commanders consistently neglected the key factors that shaped traditional African warfare and that the German commanders adhered much more closely to these key principles.

According to John Lamphear, a professor in the Department of History at the University of Texas-Austin specializing in African history, pre-colonial, traditional African warfare

demonstrated four key factors that appeared with varying degrees of consistency across the region:

-Control of people and resources instead of territory

-Utilization of numerically small forces

-Conducting raids instead of engaging in protracted conflict

-Rudimentary logistics[29]

These key factors, having evolved from constraints imposed by the local environment, characterized African military practice prior to the arrival of the European colonials. Understanding how the environment affected traditional warfare assists in understanding why Allied forces proved unable to defeat their German adversary despite the Allies' advantages.

The control of people and resources was generally more important than the control of territory in determining the nature of African conflict.[30] Africa, the second largest continent, constitutes a geographically immense territory. Its comparatively small population, however, stands in stark contrast to its geographic largesse. Within the context of pre-colonial African warfare, the military objective most often involved controlling the population due to the low population density in sub-Saharan Africa. Land, generally speaking, was available in abundance; people and other resources proved comparatively scarce. As a consequence, people and resources possessed a significantly greater value than land.

Africa has always been one of the least densely populated continents for two primary reasons: the lack of large-scale agriculture and the prevalence of disease. These two factors combined to act as a persistent brake on population growth. The absence of large-scale agriculture affected the land's ability to support large populations and the prevalence of disease inhibited widespread human adaptation to the environment.

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[29] Jeremy Black, *War in the Modern World Since 1815* (London: Routledge, 2003), 172.

[30] Ibid, 171.

The absence of large-scale agriculture results from multiple environmental restraints. Throughout East Africa, small farmers contended with poor soil quality and diminished fertility that frequently resulted from overuse. Extended and recurring drought combined with often erratic weather patterns contributed significantly to the inability of East Africa to support large scale agriculture. Unsustainable practices such as over-cultivation and overgrazing also contributed to the lack of agricultural productivity and production.[31]

Disease constitutes the second factor that historically contributed to Africa's low population density. Disease routinely ravaged the African population which reduced the overall number of people. This recurring phenomenon reduced the population available to support what agriculture did exist thereby reinforcing the inability of agriculture to take hold on a larger scale. Disease also adversely affected the development of large-scale agriculture by effectively restricting the use of animal labor. The tsetse fly rendered large swaths of territory inhospitable for horses and cattle. The inability to extensively employ draft animals served to further reinforce the inability of the land to support large scale agriculture

The effects of disease that retarded the development of large-scale agriculture also worked to keep military forces small. Malaria and "sleeping sickness" constituted two of the most debilitating diseases that affected military operations in East Africa. The Center for Disease Control defines malaria as "a serious and sometimes fatal disease caused by a parasite that commonly infects a certain type of mosquito which feeds on humans."[32] People who get malaria are typically very sick with high fevers, shaking chills, and flu-like illness. Of the four kinds of malaria parasites that can infect humans, Plasmodium falciparum remains indigenous to east

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[31] Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany). *Sustainable Agriculture: A Pathway out of Poverty for East Africa's Rural Poor* (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit , 2006), 3.

[32] Center for Disease Control, "Malaria Home > Frequently Asked Questions," http://www.cdc.gov/Malaria/faq.htm (accessed July 28, 2009).

Africa and, if not promptly treated, may lead to death. In most cases, malaria causes fever, chills, headache, muscle ache, vomiting, malaise and other flu-like symptoms, which incapacitate the victim. Additionally, some persons infected with Plasmodium falciparum can develop complications such as brain disease (cerebral malaria), severe anemia, and kidney failure. These severe forms occur more frequently in people with little protective immunity, and can result in death or life-long neurologic impairment. People who have developed protective immunity (through past infections, as is the case with most adults in high transmission areas) may be infected but not made ill by the parasites they carry.[33]

The second major disease, East African trypanosomiasis, known as sleeping sickness among humans or as nagana among horses and cattle, constitutes a significant problem throughout East Africa that debilitates humans and reduces the ability to utilize horses and other draft animals in significant portions of the continent. Caused by the parasite Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense which is carried by the tsetse fly, the disease spreads when a person (or domesticated animal; wild animals are immune) is bitten by a tsetse fly infected with the Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense parasite. For humans, failure to receive medical treatment will result in death, usually within months. Fever, severe headaches, irritability, extreme fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, and aching muscles and joints are common symptoms of sleeping sickness. Progressive confusion, personality changes, and other neurologic problems occur after infection has invaded the central nervous system.[34] For domesticated animals, infection results in the animals becoming weak and unproductive due to an interaction that produces extensive pathology and severe anemia. Nagana often results in death and demonstrates wide ranging impact at the herd level. All aspects of

[33] Center for Disease Control, "Malaria: Topic Home," http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/index.htm (accessed July 28, 2009).

[34] Center for Disease Control, "Fact Sheet - East African Trypanosomiasis," http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/trypanosomiasis/factsht_ea_trypanosomiasis.htm (accessed July 28, 2009).

production are depressed: fertility is impaired; milk yields, growth and work output are reduced; and the mortality rate may reduce herd size.[35] These diseases, combined with the absence of large scale agriculture, contribute to suppress the overall demographics for the region thus elevating the importance of people and resources.

The African emphasis on capturing people and resources directly related to the nature of authority and legitimacy within the African tribal structure. In order for tribal chiefs to attract and retain support they needed to demonstrate the capability to provide for their people. In order to meet these expectations cattle raids were often required. By engaging in successful cattle raids, chiefs often acquired a reputation for effective governance as evidenced by their prosperity. Because of this prosperity, less fortunate clans would seek to join the more powerful and prosperous clans by acknowledging their authority. In return, the less prosperous clans received food and protection. The net effect resulted in the acquiring clan growing in both material wealth and, to a lesser extent, population. In a rather typical episode, Moshoeshoe, King of the Basotho (subsequently conquered and incorporated into the Cape Colony), illustrates this point. "Raiding cattle from rival clans was one way for a young warrior to enrich himself and build up a reputation. Such raids were usually carried out by a few adventurous individuals acting on their own initiative, who travelled fast, making the most of the terrain, hoping to catch their enemy by surprise and sweep away his cattle before he could muster to oppose them."[36] In this context, ejecting the local inhabitants from their farms was relatively pointless; seizing their livestock and food stores provided significant utility for those conducting the raid. Within this cultural dynamic, the actual control of territory mattered very little.

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[35] United States National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health PubMed, "Regional Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Control Programme, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe," http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7501369 (accessed July 28, 2009).

[36] Ian Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa* (Dorset: Firebird Books, 1994), 58.

The second key factor Lamphear identifies relates to the utilization of relatively small numbers of personnel when conducting military actions. The African proclivity to utilize small forces resulted from their experiences indicating that large forces could only be sustained for extremely brief periods of time within the African environment. When circumstance forced the movement of large groups of people in sub-Saharan Africa, the effects were frequently catastrophic. The following example illustrates the pitfalls of mass movements of people in this environment. In the early nineteenth century in southern Africa, warfare forced the dislocation of one clan. Their migration as refugees resulted in "a hoarde of hungry men, women and children who, cut off from their own sources of food, had no choice but to attack anyone who lay in their path, plundering grain stores and looting cattle."[37] Within Africa, migration or movement could easily take on a separate logic all its own. In order for military operations in Africa to retain their focus, the units needed to be relatively small. If units became too large, circumstances would soon dictate that military leaders shift from their initial military objective to an objective that would facilitate the sustenance of their own force. This shift improperly handled could easily devolve into foraging for survival.

The use of smaller units by the Africans demonstrated its benefits within the African environment even when utilized against superior forces. In describing the Basotho, Ian Knight notes that "what is striking… is its consistent success, even when fighting European enemies armed with superior weapons…. The Sotho preferred to mount lightning raids or to retire to defensive strongholds. Raiding was, of course, the primary military activity in the days before the lifaqane[38], and was conducted as stealthily as possible, making the most of natural cover. In the

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[37] Ibid, 60.

[38] "Llifaqane," sometimes spelled "difaqane," roughly translates as "the crushing" or "scattering." William F. Lye in his article "The Difaqane: The Mfecane in the Southern Sotho Area, 1822-24," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1967) explains this event as "that great series of raids and wars carried on by whole communities of displaced and wandering Bantu peoples… These wars appear to have been precipitated by the rise of Shaka's Zulu empire among the coastal Nguni-speaking peoples, which

wars against the Free State, Sotho raids behind Boer lines, striking at undefended farms, quickly undermined the morale of commandos at the front."[39] The practice of using small tactical formations highlights the restraints imposed by the African environment that limit the resourcing of large armies.

The presence of large, permanent armies presupposes the capability for a society to adequately resource these formations. Because of the prevailing nature of subsistence agriculture within Africa, this precondition simply did not exist. On the rare occasions that large formations were assembled, the associated cost involved stripping the productive agricultural base of its required labor. The constraint that emerges, rather obviously, from this situation is that an army of any significant size will begin any campaign with essentially all of the provisions that it will have. With no labor force left to grow or transport required food, the army that was assembled can exist only so long as their provisions last or as long as they can forage off the land. For large armies, foraging off the land becomes inherently problematic when the land itself demonstrates suitability only for limited subsistence agriculture.

The combination of smaller military forces and a focus on controlling population and resources instead of terrain effectively led to the practice of 'raiding war' as opposed to large-scale, protracted military actions. The utilization of raids instead of more extensive military operations should not however be construed as a less lethal or less effective means of waging warfare. Within the African context, raids targeted the societal infrastructure and sought to acquire or destroy the very resources needed to perpetuate a society and wage war. In this regard traditional African raids have more in common conceptually with western notions of war that

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caused refugee communities to flee over the Drakensberg mountain passes. But they were continued and extended over the whole interior by resident Southern Sotho-speaking peoples who seem to have been unable to unite in a dynamic polity which could resist the advanced military and political system of the Nguni invaders."

[39] Knight, *Warrior Chiefs*, 92.

target infrastructure and economic capacity. Women and children, often targets in traditional African warfare, constituted the means of perpetuating the traditional society. Livestock and food, also frequent targets of raids, constituted the means of measuring wealth. In traditional African warfare, the decision to engage in military action effectively constituted a business decision. The action had to 'turn a profit' by strengthening one's own position at the expense of the adversary. Military action in the African paradigm constituted a zero-sum game.

Because of the environment, campaigns with large armies occurred infrequently and when they did occur it was of necessity for a short duration. Raids provided a means to engage in sustainable military operations in a manner that benefitted those engaging in the offensive while simultaneously weakening the enemy. The population and the resources necessary to sustain the society become military objectives. Thus in traditional African warfare, little distinction existed between civilians and combatants. This lack of distinction becomes a defining characteristic of the traditional African way of war and constitutes an aspect of warfare that would come to the forefront during the East African campaign during World War I. In describing the conflict between the Ndwandwe and the Zulu, Knight notes that all "armies provisioned themselves by foraging, and the Ndwandwe expected to survive in enemy territory by looting Zulu grain stores and cattle. As they advanced, however, Shaka fell back before them, taking his herds and grain with him. There was some skirmishing, but he refused to engage in a heavy battle, drawing the Ndwandwe farther and farther from their own borders. As they began to suffer from hunger and exhaustion, so Shaka harassed them, especially at night."[40] This description of pre-colonial tribal warfare foreshadowed the future of warfare in East Africa during World War I.

The fourth and most persistent feature of traditional African warfare expresses itself in the rudimentary nature of logistics in Africa. The terrain is inhospitable and the terrain matters. In placing economic warfare as practiced by colonizing European powers within the context of the

[40] Knight, *Warrior Chiefs*, 24.

experience of African raiding warfare, Lamphear notes, "In many expeditions, most attacks on civilian economies were carried out by African contingents allied to the colonialists who were fighting traditional enemies in traditional ways. In the process, logistical dilemmas were also solved, as invading forces supplied themselves at the expense of their enemies."[41] In pre-colonial tribal warfare logistics embodied the notion of simplicity because of environmental considerations. The narrative of World War I in East Africa illustrates with disconcerting clarity the pitfalls involved when maneuver and logistics do not account for environmental constraints. The next section focuses chronologically on the first two years of the war, 1914-1915, when the relative balance of combat power between German and Allied forces in East Africa was more equitable. The following section will cover from 1916 until the end of the war, the period when relative combat strength decisively shifted to favor Great Britain and her allies.

Section 3 – The East African Campaign 1914-1915

Having examined the nature and essential logic underlying four key factors of traditional African warfare, the following two sections will compare how the Allied and German forces applied these key factors in their operations. The first seventeen months of World War I in Africa constituted a period of sweeping change for both the colonial governments and the African people. Initially it was far from clear as to how World War I would affect the African colonies or if it would have any significant impact on the colonies at all. Within the first month the answer became obvious – war had come to Africa. During this period both the British and the Germans engaged in rapid assessments of their respective capabilities as well as those of their adversaries. Poorly executed operations followed by a relative stalemate characterize the period from August 1914 until the end of 1915. An analysis of these initial operations and the subsequent reactions by

[41] Black, *War in the Modern World*, 181.

the combatants will dispel some common misperceptions regarding the nature of First World War operations and illuminate some of the reasons for the lack of Allied success in East Africa.

Prior to examining the campaign in East Africa, the initial conflict between the German Schütztruppen and the South African forces in German Southwest Africa requires additional review. The campaign in German Southwest Africa constituted the first significant Allied victory in Africa (the battle for Togoland lasted less than three weeks) and significantly influenced how the British and the South Africans would initially fight in East Africa. Tim Stapleton, a historian at Trent University, Ontario, notes that the open terrain of Southwest Africa enabled the South Africans to use mounted and motorized units to surround the Germans and quickly defeat them.[42] This reliance in Southwest Africa on mounted maneuver by all white units, combined with relatively low casualties, came to define "success" for South African forces. It shaped their views of how war should be fought. Unfortunately the British and South African forces would eventually discover, at great cost to the British Empire, that the lessons of the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902, and the German Southwest Africa campaign had limited practical application when fighting in East Africa. The tyranny of the terrain would seriously afflict future operations in East Africa to a degree unforeseen by Allied forces.

Before advancing further, a survey of the respective British and German commanders would prove useful prior to examining the East Africa campaign itself. One of the constraints faced by the British manifested itself in the rapid change of commanders. Over the course of the East Africa campaign, the British had eight different commanders. Brigadier General J.M. Stewart, Major General Arthur E. Aitken, Major General Richard Wapshire, and Major General M.J. Tighe all came from the British forces in India. Collectively they delivered an undistinguished performance. In November 1915, General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien was selected for

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[42] Tim Stapleton, *No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East Africa Campaign of the First World War* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 16.

command of the British forces in East Africa. He had extensive experience in both Europe and Africa, which he relied upon when developing his plans for the British prior to arriving in East Africa. Unfortunately, General Smith-Dorrien fell ill with pneumonia during his voyage from Great Britain to East Africa and was never able to assume active command of British forces in the field. After General Smith-Dorrien returned to England in January 1916, General Jan C. Smuts, a South African Boer who had fought against the British just fourteen years earlier, took command of all British forces in East Africa. His tenure, lasting for a year, coincided with significant developments during the campaign in East Africa and is covered in detail in Section 3. Following his departure in January 1917, Lieutenant General A. Reginald Hoskins, who had previously served as the Inspector General of the King's African Rifles, assumed command for four months before being succeeded by Major-General J.L. van Deventer. Major-General van Deventer, another South African Boer who had fought against the British in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, commanded British forces in East Africa until the war's conclusion in November 1918.

In contrast to the ever changing nature of command within the British forces, the German forces had only one commander of the Schütztruppen for the duration of the war. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck began the war as a lieutenant colonel and finished as a major general. He was, without question, a military officer of exceptional talent who possessed an unusually broad professional background that served him well in East Africa. Prior to his appointment as commander of the Schütztruppen in East Africa, von Lettow-Vorbeck had served on the German General Staff, had fought with the British in China during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900-1901, had participated in suppressing the Herero and Hottentot Rebellion under General Lothar von Trotha in German Southwest Africa in 1904-1906, and served as the Commander of the Marine Battalion at Wilhelmshaven. In addition to these assignments he alternated between regimental and staff

assignments throughout his career.[43] His experience on staff, working with the British, fighting the Africans, and working with the navy all provided invaluable experience for his future position as commander of the Schütztruppen.

From the initiation of hostilities on August 8, 1914, until the British landed at Tanga on November 4, 1914, the campaign in East Africa remained characterized by small scale engagements on both sides as they attempted to secure critical terrain, achieve dominance upon the lakes and waterways, and reposition forces for future offensive actions. Actions between British and German forces in August and September 1914 contrast markedly with engagements that occurred in Africa later in the war in both the number of combatants involved and in geographic scope. During these first two months, the Schütztruppen slightly outnumbered their British adversaries in the total number of askaris available but they possessed a distinct advantage regarding the number of European officers and non-commissioned officers available.[44] In August 1914, the Germans had 218 European officers and non-commissioned officers and 2542 askaris;[45] the British comparatively had 73 European officers and non-commissioned officers with 2325 askaris.[46]

Within a week of the first shots being fired and continuing through September 1914, von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Schütztruppen, in an effort to prevent the British from fortifying their border defenses, launched five incursions into territories bordering German East Africa. Four out of the five German actions failed, in varying degrees, to achieve their initial aim. On August 15, 1914, the Germans launched an attack led by Captain von Prince against Taveta, located approximately 12 miles across the frontier in British East Africa, with 300 men. This constituted

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[43] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 16.

[44] Askari – an African soldier serving the European colonial powers. Also used to describe police and gendarmerie.

[45] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 102.

[46] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 559.

the one successful German operation during the first weeks of the war and resulted in the German occupation of Taveta until March 19, 1916. Taveta constituted key terrain because its occupation facilitated control of the corridor between the foothills of Mt Kilimanjaro and the North Pare Mountains, the primary route between British East Africa and German East Africa (see Appendix II, Figure 2). Additionally, by controlling this area von Lettow-Vorbeck also possessed a point of departure for future military actions against the British controlled Uganda Railway that ran from Mombasa on the coast of British East Africa to Kimusu on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria.

While the German attack on Taveta did not exhibit all of the characteristics of pre-colonial African warfare, several factors combined to facilitate the attainment of a favorable result. Even though the objective of this engagement was terrain oriented, the seizure of this particular piece of ground did facilitate the control of a corridor that controlled the north-south movement of people and resources. The number of soldiers involved in the action exceeded what was customary in pre-colonial warfare but two anomalous factors mitigated the traditional drawbacks associated with using large forces in African warfare. First, Taveta lay just to the north of the German's Usambara Railway that greatly assisted in the resupply and movement of German forces. The presence of a reliable line of communication that could facilitate the transport of significant amounts of supply alleviated many of the risks associated with using large formations. Secondly, the nature of the geography facilitated, and in von Lettow-Vorbeck's view necessitated, a permanent occupation of the terrain as opposed to the more traditional raid. If the Germans wanted to pursue actions inside of British East Africa and prevent the British from moving against German East Africa, they needed to occupy and retain the terrain around Taveta. The occupation of Taveta contributed significantly in enabling the Germans to deprive the British of the initiative in August 1914.

After the German seizure of Taveta in mid-August, the Schütztruppen commenced on a series of offensive actions against Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, and British East Africa in an effort to prevent the British from consolidating and strengthening their defenses.[47] The results were hardly encouraging for the Germans. The first operation occurred on September 5, when General (retired) Wahle, who happened to be visiting German East Africa when war broke out, moved into Northern Rhodesia with 100 askaris and 250 ruga-ruga.[48] As they moved towards the village of Abercorn, approximately 40 Rhodesian police askari managed to defend the village. After failing to take the village, General Wahle laid siege to Abercorn but eventually withdrew after Major Stennett marched ninety-nine miles from Kasama in sixty-six hours with over 100 British reinforcements to relieve the siege.[49] This forced march by Major Stennett's formation constitutes one of many examples that call into question common assumptions regarding the inferiority of British askari when compared to the German askari (particularly at the beginning of the war).

The second engagement, initiated on September 7, involved Major von Langenn-Steinkeller and the 5th Feldkompanie attacking the town of Karonga. [50] Located just inside Nyasaland on the northwest shore of Lake Nyasa, Major von Langenn-Steinkeller attempted to re-establish a German presence on the lake. Unfortunately for the Schütztruppen, the British used reinforcements to ambush 5/FK and inflicted casualties of over seventy percent. In the third German operation, Captain Bock von Wülfingen attacked an undefended British boma in Kisii,

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[47] Edward Paice, *World War I: The African Front* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2008), 29.

[48] Ruga ruga – African irregulars, levies, or mercenaries.

[49] Ibid, 32.

[50] Feldkompanie – field company, the basic self-sufficient element of the Schützstruppen. Comprised of seven or eight European officers and NCOs with 150-200 askaris (normal complement was 160); normally included two machine gun teams. 5th Feldkompanie is abbreviated "5/FK."

British East Africa, with 7/FK.[51] Three companies from 4th King's African Rifles (abbreviated 4/KAR) reinforced and successfully repulsed the attack.[52]

The final German operation in September 1914, and one that achieved some limited success despite failing to achieve its actual objective, involved a German attack towards Mombasa in British East Africa. Mombasa, the largest port in British East Africa and the railhead for the Uganda Railway, constituted a key location for the British. Paice notes that "the closest that any incursion to British East Africa came to resembling a full-scale invasion was the advance of Captain Baumstark's 15/FK, 16/FK and 17/FK towards Mombasa in late September, wreaking havoc throughout the southern coastlands" with approximately 600 men.[53] Much of Mombasa, to include dependents, money, and railway equipment, had been evacuated in anticipation of the German advance. In an action similar to that at Kisii, three companies from 1/KAR reinforced the garrison at Mombasa and successfully halted the German attack.

In the aftermath of these successive failures, offensive actions by the Schütztruppen effectively came to a halt in October 1914 as reconsolidation and reorganization became a priority for the Schütztruppen. The following commentary by a Boer War veteran exemplifies the prevailing British view regarding German tactics. In writing home to his sister on August 30, 1914, he states, "I don't understand the German scheme of campaign in these parts. They seem to be sending small forces here there and everywhere – more like sort of raiding forces than forces attacking with any idea of conquest. I suppose they have been told by their Colonial Office to fight, and think that any old sort of fighting will do, knowing that it will all be the same in the long run."[54] Both British and German operations during this initial phase were quite similar. As

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[51] Boma – fortified position, normally a police station or government center.

[52] Paice, *African Front*, 31.

[53] Ibid, 29.

[54] Ibid, 27.

Charles Horden notes "during this first phase of the campaign all (actions) presented much the same features: the advance of a small German force, its encounter with a small British force, a confused fight in thick bush, mutual exaggeration of each other's strength, and an eventual retreat as much for the sake of caring for the wounded as from any tactical necessity."[55] In the long-term greater context of the war, the Germans could ill afford continued actions that resulted in little gain and irreplaceable losses. In order to break this cycle and to facilitate his strategy to tie down as many British forces as possible, von Lettow-Vorbeck spent October 1914 consolidating his forces in the northeastern part of the colony.

While the German execution of small unit actions had room for improvement, the fundamental principles employed initially by both sides reflected the characteristics consistent with pre-colonial African warfare. Both sides, out of necessity, utilized small numbers of soldiers across a wide geographic area. Of note, the preponderance of initial British success corresponded with a brief period, from August until November 1914, when the British had no alternative but to utilize their local African troops, the Kings African Rifles (KAR). H. Moyse-Bartlett explains that "twelve years of constant marching, patrolling and fighting lay behind most of the 21 companies of the King's African Rifles in the summer of 1914."[56] This combat experience in Africa contributed significantly to the relative success of British forces in the first weeks of the war. As British reliance on the KAR waned in favor of employing Indian and South African troops, so too did their initial success.

While the Schütztruppen reconsolidated and reviewed its previous actions, the British prepared to take the offensive in East Africa. On October 31, Indian Expeditionary Force B (IEF B) arrived from India in order to conduct an amphibious landing at Tanga in German East Africa.

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[55] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 59.

[56] H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Wellington: Gale and Polden Limited, 1956), 259.

With a strength of 7,972 personnel, Major General Arthur E. Aitken, the commander for IEF B, was instructed to "bring the whole of German East Africa under British authority."[57] Focusing first on costal installations with port facilities, the British sought to eliminate potential safe harbors for German cruisers while simultaneously impeding the resupply of German forces from outside sources. Having secured the port, the British could then advance from Tanga along the Usambara Railway towards Taveta in order to secure the areas of German East Africa occupied by Europeans thus resulting in a general surrender of the colony (see Appendix II, Figure 3).

The planned British invasion of Tanga failed miserably. IEF B consisted of an amalgamation of disparate units. "One brigade came from Bangalore, not one of the 'martial' areas of India, and the other was formed of the troops of the Indian princely states" according to Hew Strachan.[58] In the opinion of Richard Meinertzhagen, the IEF B intelligence officer, these forces constituted "the worst in India."[59] The planning for the amphibious invasion was even worse. Meinertzhagen notes, "the landing at Tanga was based on a plan devised in London, where the fighting value of Indian Army troops and German-led African troops had not been appreciated."[60] Britain had hastily assembled, deployed, and utilized Indian Army troops resulting in an operation that devolved into a debacle almost from its inception.

At 0705 hours on November 2, 1914, Captain Caulfield took *HMS Fox* into Tanga and presented an ultimatum to the German administration that demanded the surrender the town or face bombardment.[61] Having sacrificed the element of surprise by presenting the ultimatum, the British unwittingly facilitated von Lettow-Vorbeck's immediate efforts to concentrate his forces in Tanga. Utilizing the Usambara railway, von Lettow-Vorbeck moved approximately six

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[57] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 65.

[58] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 108.

[59] Richard Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary, 1899-1926* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 82.

[60] Ibid, 103.

[61] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 108.

companies into Tanga.[62] Aitken did not land his first units until 0430 hours the next day and by 0530 hours the lead elements of IEF B were pinned down on the eastern edge of town.[63] By 2000 hours on November 3, IEF B was ashore but not until the following day, November 4, after giving the Germans fifty four hours to prepare for the battle, did Aitken feel ready to advance on Tanga.[64] At noon, IEF B began its advance.

Two brigades advanced into fully manned German defenses just outside of Tanga shortly after they began their movement. Heavy vegetation and German machine gun fire effectively disrupted the British formations as they pressed their attack.[65] Aitken's plan involved attacking into Tanga with the purpose of turning the southern flank of the German position. The result was chaos. The absence of cohesion and coordination combined with a counterattack by von Lettow-Vorbeck's reserves in mid-afternoon effectively left Aitken with few options but to terminate his attack and pull back.[66]

Chaos on both sides characterized the night of 4-5 November. While Aitken pulled back his forces to the beachhead, von Lettow-Vorbeck pulled his German forces out of Tanga fearing the guns of the *HMS Fox*. The town remained abandoned for the entire evening, each side unaware that the other had completely pulled out. On the morning of November 5, Meinertzhagen crossed over the German lines under a flag of truce to coordinate the evacuation of the wounded prior to the British embarkation. With this, the Battle of Tanga reached its conclusion.

The debacle at Tanga in November 1914 effectively dissuaded the British from significant offensive actions in East Africa for more than a year. Aitken constituted the first

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[62] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 36.

[63] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 109.

[64] Farwell, *The Great War in Africa*, 169.

[65] Ross Anderson, *The Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2004), 54.

[66] Ibid, 54.

commander in a long series for the British to be relieved of his command. For the Germans, the victory at Tanga against overwhelming odds fortified von Lettow-Vorbeck's reputation and significantly bolstered German morale. Logistically significant for the overall German war effort was the capture of 16 machine guns, 455 rifles, 600,000 rounds of ammunition, as well as telephone equipment, clothing, and other miscellaneous military accouterments.[67]

In assessing the multiple causes for the British failure, Meinertzhagen asserted that "the British invading force had no knowledge of bush warfare."[68] An offer from the Colonial Office to provide a battalion from the KAR as a covering force for the invasion had been refused by Aitken. Aitken's refusal to employ the African troops available to him reflected his prejudices against the Africans. Meinertzhagen, based upon his previous experiences in East Africa, had told Aitken that the German askari were "better trained, disciplined, and led than our own King's African Rifles," to which Aitken responded "the Indian Army will make short work of a lot of niggers."[69] The consistent British underestimation of the askaris and their combat effectiveness, particularly within the context of the East African environment, contributed significantly to the British defeat. The failure of the British attack on Tanga fundamentally changed the nature of the conflict in East Africa and "made inevitable a campaign on a scale not previously contemplated."[70] As 1914 came to an end, both sides began to contemplate campaigns on a grander scale.

As Anne Samson notes, "during 1915 the 'battle' for East Africa took place in London between the Colonial and War Offices: the former promoting action and the latter defense."[71] The Colonial Office, bureaucratically inclined to advocate the seizure of greater territory on behalf of

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[67] Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, 104.

[68] Ibid, 103.

[69] Ibid, 105.

[70] Moyse-Bartlett, *KAR*, 275.

[71] Samson, *Union Comes of Age*, 46.

the Empire, sought to aggressively pursue offensive actions in an effort to defeat the Germans while simultaneously acquiring greater territory. The War Office, conversely, sought to wage a defensive war with limited resources. In this regard the War Office's perspective mirrored that of von Lettow-Vorbeck: effort and resources expended in Africa were therefore not expended on the battlefields of Europe. As these two opposing concepts competed for dominance within the corridors of power in London, the battlefield in East Africa remained characterized by small scale engagements during the first six months of 1915.

In February 1915, British and German forces clashed on the coast at Jasin, which resulted in a German victory. Coming just over three months after the British defeat at Tanga any British ambition for offensive operations effectively evaporated. For von Lettow-Vorbeck, the Battle of Jasin constituted a turning point in how he viewed the conflict in East Africa. While the battle constituted a tactical German victory, the cost proved excessive. The deaths of six irreplaceable German officers and the expenditure of 200,000 rounds of ammunition amounted to unsustainable losses for the long term. After the engagement von Lettow-Vorbeck acknowledged, "the need to strike great blows only quite exceptionally and to restrict myself principally to guerilla warfare was evidently imperative."[72] Because of this realization, von Lettow-Vorbeck reverted to the tactical employment of numerically smaller formations. Operationally he abandoned his quest for decisive engagements and instead adopted decentralized methods reminiscent of guerilla warfare.

After the Battle of Jasin in February 1915, naval actions constituted the most notable events for the remainder of the year. In April, the *Rubens* landed in Manasa Bay and provided the Schütztruppen with a significant amount of resupply. Despite the British attempts to blockade East Africa, the Germans still proved able to resupply their forces, albeit with great irregularity. The other major naval action involved the destruction of the *Königsberg* in the Rufiji Delta. With

[72] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 63.

the sinking of the *Königsberg*, one of the few remaining strategic reasons from the British military perspective for continued military involvement in East Africa disappeared. The German navy could no longer threaten the British sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean.

On July 9, 1915, German forces in Southwest Africa surrendered to South African General Louis Botha. With this event it became apparent that a significant number of South African forces would likely redeploy from Southwest Africa to East Africa. For the remainder of 1915, both sides prepared for what was recognized as an inevitable escalation of the conflict in East Africa.

By the end of 1915, after the first seventeen months of war, the situation for both the British and the Germans remained relatively unchanged on the ground. The use of Indian Army troops by the British in East Africa had proven disastrous largely due to their lack of familiarity with the African environment. South African troops had not yet arrived in force in East Africa. Both the British and the Germans had so far used primarily African troops, albeit in limited numbers with relative success. In 1916 the numbers of combatants in East Africa, the composition of those forces, the geographic scope of the battlefield, and the impact on every aspect of East African society would all change.

Section 4 – The East African Campaign 1916-1918

This section subdivides into three distinct subsections: the arrival of Lieutenant General Jan C. Smuts and the maneuver oriented offensives of 1916, the assumption of command by Major General Jacobus van Deventer in mid-1917 and the transition to a force oriented approach which sought to destroy the Schütztruppen, and finally Generalmajor von Lettow-Vorbeck's invasion of Portuguese East Africa in late 1917 in order to preserve the Schütztruppen.[73] The

[73] Hoyt, *Guerilla*, p. 175; von Lettow-Vorbeck's promotion was from Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) to Generalmajor, bypassing full Colonel. Generalmajor was equivalent to Brigadier in the British Army and Brigadier General in the U.S. Army.

three subsections characterize distinctly different phases of the conflict from 1916 to 1918. Lieutenant General Smuts envisioned a campaign of maneuver orchestrated for the purpose of conquering as much terrain as possible while minimizing friendly casualties. Major General van Deventer, upon succeeding Smuts, adopted a force oriented approach which sought to destroy the Schütztruppen. This approach marked a significant departure from the previous strategy's focus on the occupation of terrain. As 1917 drew to a close, Major General van Deventer's force oriented strategy had narrowed Generalmajor von Lettow-Vorbeck's options thus forcing him to advance into Portuguese East Africa in order to maintain the Schützstruppen as a viable fighting force. It was in 1916 that the battle for East Africa began in earnest.

The British sought to conquer German East Africa from the very beginning of the war, an intent that manifested itself in guidance provided to Major General Arthur Aitken prior to the invasion of Tanga in 1914. By 1916 Great Britain and her allies had assembled sufficient manpower and materiel in East Africa to commence a serious undertaking and thereby markedly changed the war's overall situation. The defeat of the Schützstruppen in the Cameroons on February 18, 1916 allowed the British to reallocate significant numbers of African soldiers from Nigeria and the Gold Coast to East Africa.[74] On March 5, 1916 the Allies launched an offensive with British forces attacking German East Africa from the north out of British East Africa and from the south out of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.[75] Near simultaneously the Belgian forces attacked from the Congo in the west. This marked a significant transition from the warfare of the previous year and a half. At the end of 1915 the overall military situation in East Africa had changed little since the opening of hostilities in August 1914. By the end of 1916, Germany had effectively lost German East Africa, its last remaining colony in Africa. Changes in British

[74] Charles Miller, *Battle for the Bundu: The First World War in East Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 235.

[75] Paice, *African Front*, 188.

leadership, the addition of significant numbers of British troops, and the severe restrictions on Germany's ability to reconstitute its forces all contributed to this dramatic change in fortune.

For the British, 1916 witnessed the emergence of experienced leadership well versed in the peculiarities of African warfare. In March 1916, Major General A.R. Hoskins assumed command of the British 1st Division and brought significant African experience to the force having previously served as the Inspector General of the King's African Rifles.[76] On March 19, 1916, Lieutenant General Smuts arrived in Mombasa and assumed command of all British forces in East Africa. Although not a professional soldier, Smuts demonstrated above average competence despite his relative inexperience commanding such a large force. A South African Boer who had fought Great Britain less than twenty years earlier, Smuts emerged as a galvanizing figure among the British forces. F. Brett Young writes in *Marching on Tanga*, "I think that the thing which most sustained our confidence and made us embark with such high hopes upon the second phase of the East African operations was our absolute confidence in the leadership of Smuts. That he was a fine strategist, the move on Moshi, in spite of the failure of the northern enveloping column, had shown us. Of his personal courage we had been assured by the incidents of the Lumi fight; but there was yet another factor – in this case one might almost have called it a personal tribute – in his success which demanded our confidence, and that was the luck which as followed him throughout his career."[77] British forces, despite some reservations among the British officers due to Smuts' South African pedigree, largely expressed significant confidence in his leadership.

A South African who had risen to the highest levels of political power within both the South African Union and within Great Britain, Smuts demonstrated a rare mastery of geopolitics. His military strategy for East Africa requires examination from both the British and South

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[76] Hordern, *Military Operations*, 30.

[77] Francis B. Young, *Marching on Tanga* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1917), 5.

African perspectives, as there was often a tension between South African regional interests and the interests of the greater British Empire. The Union of South Africa pursued a significantly more expansionistic agenda regarding its neighbors than was articulated in British policy. From the very beginning, the implicit agenda in South Africa's act of Union was its extension to the line of the Zambezi.[78] For the Afrikaner population living in the Transvaal, the closest ports from which to ship their agricultural products were not in South Africa. Delagoa Bay and Beira, both located in Portuguese East Africa, were much more accessible. The convergence of British short term needs and South African long-term ambitions influenced the development of Smuts' strategy every bit as much as relevant military factors.[79]

The leading South Africans – Louis Botha (first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa), Lieutenant General Jan Smuts (Commander, British East African Force), and John X. Merriman (the last prime minister of the Cape Colony before the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910) – hoped that by participating in, and defeating German East Africa, South Africa would gain part of Portuguese East Africa in exchange for a piece of German East Africa.[80] Smuts stated: "But they [the British Government] now practically intimate that in future German East Africa will be our destination. If that country were conquered by us, we could probably effect an exchange with Moçambique and so consolidate our territories south of the Zambesi and Kunene."[81] Hew Strachan notes that "Smuts' idea was to conquer German East Africa, and then to allocate its northern territory to Britain and its southern to Portugal. In exchange, Portugal would be asked to give the southern part of its existing colony, including Delagoa Bay and Beira,

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[78] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 132.

[79] Ibid, 132.

[80] Samson, *Union Comes of Age*, 114.

[81] Hancock and van der Poel, Selections from the Smuts Papers, III, 30 Aug 15, Letter Smuts to J.X. Merriman, 310. Quoted in Ross Anderson, *The Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2004), 102.

to South Africa."[82] In order to achieve this end, Smuts needed to both conquer German East Africa and achieve this conquest at a reasonable cost.

Of particular importance to Smuts was the cost in blood, particularly South African blood. Politicians in Pretoria reminded Smuts with monotonous regularity about the difficulties in recruiting men and he remained acutely aware that returning to South Africa labeled a butcher equaled political suicide.[83] The constraint facing Smuts to minimize casualties predisposed him to utilizing maneuver rather than frontal assault in his attempts to subjugate von Lettow-Vorbeck. In Smuts' experience, both in the Anglo-South African War of 1899-1902 and in the campaign against the Schütztruppen in German Southwest Africa, maneuver achieved victory at an acceptable price. These experiences significantly influenced the development of Smuts' plans for the conquest of German East Africa. Maneuver in an attempt to "checkmate" the Schützstruppen, not the physical destruction of enemy forces, emerged as the underlying concept for Smuts' operation.

Smuts initiated his offensive on March 5, 1916 with attacks from multiple directions. The main attack came out of British East Africa from the north. The Belgian Force Publique, under the command of General Charles Tombeur, initiated its attack from the Belgian Congo in the west with two columns. The first phase of Smuts' offensive against the Schützstruppen necessitated an attack against Taveta, located to the southeast of Kilimanjaro. Taveta, straddling the gap between Kilimanjaro and the Pare Mountains, dominated the only significant mobility corridor that facilitated movement between British East Africa and German East Africa. Von Lettow-Vorbeck recognized this early on and occupied this terrain within the first week of hostilities in the summer of 1914. For Smuts to engage in any sustained offensive, the capture of Taveta was imperative. By utilizing Brigadier General van Deventer's mounted cavalry brigade to conduct an

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[82] Strachan, *First World War in Africa,* 133.

[83]Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary, 1*66, 200.

envelopment to the north of Salatia across the foothills of Kilimanjaro in concert with a direct attack from Major General Michael Tighe's 2nd Division against Taveta, Smuts forced von Lettow-Vorbeck to withdraw from Taveta on March 19, 1916 due to his insufficient numerical strength.

After the Schütztruppen's withdrawal from Taveta, von Lettow-Vorbeck concentrated his forces in the vicinity of Kahe, approximately 15 miles to the southwest, along the Northern Railroad. Smuts determined that in order to consolidate his position he must achieve two things. First, the British must displace the Schützstruppen from Kahe. Second, he needed to dominate the Masai Steppe extending 100-120 miles south of Moschi-Aruscha to Kondoa Idrangi and Handeni.

Both the effort to displace von Lettow-Vorbeck from Kahe and the attempt to extend British domination across the Masai Steppe encountered significant complications due to Smuts' underestimation of the environment and how it would affect the execution of his operations. Smuts' plan involved the South African brigade from Major General Tighe's 2nd Division conducting an envelopment against von Lettow-Vorbeck's right while simultaneously attacking the Schützstruppen's main position with the 1st Division. Brigadier General van Deventer's mounted brigade remained available to either interdict von Lettow-Vorbeck's force along the tracks of the Northern Railway or the mounted brigade could attack the rear of von Lettow-Vorbeck's formation in concert with the main attack.[84] Smuts' plan failed due to the density of the brush and the adverse affect it had on both mounted and dismounted maneuver. The terrain did not facilitate the swift maneuver of large forces necessary for maneuver to render a decisive favorable result. Additionally, the brush impeded effective command and control of forces for both the Germans and the British. For the British, synchronization proved extremely difficult at best. For the Germans, the intermittent reports led von Lettow-Vorbeck to make the assessment

[84] Miller, *Bundu*, 159.

that the British forces sought to threaten Kisangire south of the Ruvu River.[85] Having made such an assessment, von Lettow-Vorbeck sought to occupy Kisangire himself. The Germans, having withdrawn south of the Ruvu, allowed the British to secure their communications from Voi to Moshi.[86] The British, having failed in their attempt to subjugate the Schütztruppen, faced the difficulty of supplying a geographically dispersed force during the rainy season in East Africa.

On December 27, 1916, Lieutenant General Smuts received notification from London that he was to depart East Africa in order to represent South Africa at the Imperial War Cabinet.[87] Prior to and after his departure, Smuts regularly provided assurances to senior government officials that the war in East Africa was all but over and that the Schützstruppen had effectively been defeated. While politically convenient from Smuts' perspective, it simply was not true. Major General A.R. Hoskins, Smuts' successor, had taken over an army robbed of offensive capacity.[88] Hoskins was left with a very difficult hand and did much to rebuild the shattered force left by Smuts.[89] In Hoskins four month tenure as the commander of British Forces in East Africa he made significant advances in his efforts to reconstitute the force's combat effectiveness. The expansion of the KAR and the expansion of the Carrier Corps established capabilities that would materially contribute to the development of future combat capability.

The rains came early and heavy in 1917, effectively halting offensive operations until May.[90] Hoskins seized this opportunity to refit and reconstitute his force. In order to develop the logistical capability necessary to continue prosecuting the war, Hoskins recognized the need to improve the British logistical capabilities and sought to triple the number of carriers by imposing

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[85] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 123.

[86] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 132.

[87] Ibid, 164.

[88] Ibid, 167.

[89] Anderson, *Forgotten Front*, 297.

[90] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 180.

the "mass levy" of 1917. At the end of December 1916 the British had 62,334 effective carriers; Hoskins proposed to increase the number to 180,000 carriers and add 400 additional lorries.[91] The use of human porters and carriers had become imperative due to the weather and terrain. Motor and animal transport had become virtually impossible in the theatre of operations; "in other words it has become a porters' war."[92] These porters constituted the essential link in the logistical supply chain that enabled it to function. Without these massive numbers of carriers, executing a military campaign of any significance in East Africa would have been impossible.

While attempting to triple the number of carriers available to support British combat forces, Hoskins also undertook the expansion of the KAR. In February 1917, the number of effective British troops neared parity with the Schütztruppen when those British troops convalescing were removed from the overall British strength.[93] Upon assuming command, Hoskins proposed increasing the number of KAR battalions from the current level of 13 battalions to 20 battalions. By November 1918 the establishment was twenty-two battalions with an overall strength of 35,424 in all ranks.[94] This expansion of the KAR enabled the British to continue prosecuting the war against von Lettow-Vorbeck's Schütztruppen in the absence of significant numbers of European forces. By utilizing more African troops, the British lessened their dependence on European formations that consistently demonstrated inferior overall performance in the East African environment and were needed desperately in Europe.

In the east van Deventer, notwithstanding the perilous state of his troops and Naumann's 'stunt' in the north-east, was under strict instructions from the War Office to defeat von Lettow-

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[91] Geoffrey Hodges, *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 57.

[92] Ibid, 58.

[93] Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, 165. "hospitals are full to overflowing with strong healthy men suffering from cold feet or an excess of patriotism."

[94] Hordern, *Military Operations*, i. 265, 561-75; Moyse-Bartlett, *KAR*, 301, 413.

Vorbeck once and for all in the dry season.[95] To achieve this, Major General van Deventer planned a combined advance upon Mahenge by Brigadier General Edward Northey and the Belgians while simultaneously pushing westward from the coast both from Kilwa and from Lindi (see Appendix II, Figure IV).[96] While conceptually van Deventer's plan exhibited similarities with Smuts' schemes of maneuver, van Deventer's plan differed in that von Lettow-Vorbeck's ammunition supplies remained located along the coastline between Kilwa and Lindi. Effectively von Lettow-Vorbeck had to choose between abandoning his ammunition or engaging in battle with a numerically superior adversary. Von Lettow-Vorbeck chose the latter.

Unlike Lieutenant General Smuts, Major General van Deventer did not exhibit an undue aversion to casualties. For van Deventer, constraints that restricted opportunities for maneuver and envelopment did not necessarily restrain the British from taking offensive actions. On July 19, 1917 near Narungombe, despite the Schütztruppen's well protected positions with thick brush and swamps on both flanks, van Deventer conducted a frontal attack with the Gold Coast Regiment while moving the KAR through the swamps to attack the German flanks. Despite the severe casualties suffered by the Gold Coast Regiment, the British forced the Germans to withdraw as they had only five rounds of ammunition per man and were unaware that von Lettow-Vorbeck was marching north to reinforce them the next day. The Schützruppen fell back to Nahungu on the Mbemkuru with 945 personnel.[97]

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[95] Paice, *African Front*, 326. Naumann's 'stunt' involved Naumann splitting his command into three sections and sending them in divergent directions with the aim of drawing as many British troops from the main theater as possible. Between February 1917 and October 1917, Naumann's men had marched almost 2,000 miles and had drawn the attention of up to 6,000 men away from the main battle. Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 170.

[96] Edmund Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific, 1914-1918* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 148.

[97] Schwarte, *Weltkampf*, iv. 406. Quoted in Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 172; Boell, *Operationen*, gives dates a day later than those given in British accounts.

The next phase of van Deventer's offensive commenced in September 1917 when his force at Kilwa advanced on Nahungu. In the next eighteen days the Germans conducted thirty-seven separate engagements, many of them battles for the control of water supplies.[98] Between 16-19 October the British and Germans engaged in the most prolonged battle of the East African Campaign at Mahiwa. British forces suffered 2700 casualties out of 4900 engaged. German losses, although numerically lighter at approximately 500 out of 1500 engaged, constituted a more significant loss since von Lettow-Vorbeck could not readily replace his casualties.[99] The engagement at Mahiwa effectively neutralized von Lettow-Vorbeck's offensive power, though he kept his force in being for another year.[100]

Throughout 1917, the effects of the environment became demonstrably more pronounced on both the British and German forces. Disease continued to inflict considerable casualties on both sides. Mounted forces effectively vanished due to the continuing effects of the tsetse fly on draft animals. Supply difficulties persisted in plaguing both sides to varying degrees. The longer the war continued, the more apparent the cumulative effects of the environment became. The attempted British response towards many of these effects involved removing significant numbers of Europeans from this theater and replacing them with forces from the KAR. The Germans, having more limited options, effectively downsized their force by leaving their sick and wounded for the British to take care of and continued the fight with only their fittest and most combat capable personnel.

Under van Deventer, the British began to implement practices demonstrating greater consistency with traditional African warfare and their effectiveness, not surprisingly, increased

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[98] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 172.

[99] W.D. Downes, *With the Nigerians in German East Africa* (London: Methuen and Company, 1919), 226, gives casualties as 2700 out of 4900; von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 211-212; Moyse-Bartlett, *KAR*, 381-382.

[100] Hodges, *Carrier Corps*, 51.

accordingly. The fundamental concept behind van Deventer's offensive, to attack in such a manner as to force von Lettow-Vorbeck to fight for the control of his ammunition stores, aligned with the African concept of controlling people and resources instead of focusing on occupying terrain. By focusing on the resources, van Deventer implemented a plan that operated within the prevailing environmental constraints and made significant progress in reclaiming the initiative for the British. While the focus on controlling people and resources instead of territory constituted only one aspect of traditional African warfare, the British reconciliation with this one aspect constituted a significant departure from the previous British strategy advocated by Lieutenant General Smuts. Despite this change which reconciled one aspect of contemporary British practice with the ways of traditional African warfare, the British continued to eschew other aspects of African warfare that contradicted contemporary western military practices.

The British demonstrated a consistent determination to utilize their superior numbers despite the fact that the environment prohibited the effective logistical sustainment of such numbers and formations. The British never seriously considered adopting the traditional African practices of utilizing small forces resupplied with very rudimentary logistics as this ran counter to British military tradition and custom. Instead they attempted to overcome the limitations imposed by the environment by expanding the number of porters and carriers which thereby sought to facilitate the logistical requirements of a larger combat force. Hoskins "grand levy" exemplifies this mindset. The difficulty in attempting to surmount the prevailing environmental constraints in such a manner, however, lies in the negative effects that flow from exceeding the environment's capacity. The impressment of large segments of the African population in an effort to meet short-term war requirements resulted in unanticipated and undesired consequences.

The recruitment of Africans to directly support the war effort materially affected the capacity of the local economy to provide the necessary supply of labor required to maintain the traditional subsistence farming. As more Africans served in the European armies, fewer were available to engage in agricultural production. This disparity in the African work force adversely

affected the availability of locally produced food. The logistical issues that resulted from the lack of agricultural productivity of the land and the near absence of draft animals as a result of the tsetse fly exercised a disproportionate influence on the nature of military operations in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in East Africa in particular. As Lieutenant Colonel H. Moyse-Bartlett notes, "many bitter lessons had to be learnt before the principle of depending chiefly upon East Africa's own resources and manpower was accepted."[101]

Unlike the British, von Lettow-Vorbeck consistently operated in a manner much more in accordance with the traditional African model of warfare. Largely because the Germans did not have the luxury of consistent resupply shipments from Europe, von Lettow-Vorbeck mastered the art of managing very scarce resources relatively early in the conflict. Combined with his stated overall objective of tying down as many British forces as possible, von Lettow-Vorbeck never ascribed to a terrain oriented philosophy. The control of people and resources constituted a German necessity from the onset. The limited number of personnel in the Schütztruppen and the dispersed nature of the German formations aligned consistently with the African concept of utilizing small numbers of personnel. Von Lettow-Vorbeck's key task of preserving the Schützstruppen inclined him to practice operations that more closely resembled a series of raids as opposed to the more western notion of fixed battle with large forces in an effort to achieve decisive results. Similarly, limited resupply from the Fatherland necessitated the employment of raids in order to acquire the material resources required to sustain his combat capability. Out of necessity and circumstance, von Lettow-Vorbeck intuitively acknowledged that he could not afford to fight both the British Empire and the environment. As a result, the methods of warfare employed by the Schützstruppen aligned more consistently with the traditional methods of warfare utilized by the African tribes. Given his circumstances and intuitive understanding of these

[101] Moyse-Bartlett, *KAR*, 260.

principles, von Lettow-Vorbeck's decision to invade Portuguese East Africa was virtually a foregone conclusion.

After the battle at Mahiwa in mid-October 1917, with the offensive capacity of the Schütztruppen effectively negated, von Lettow-Vorbeck concluded for several reasons that invading Portuguese East Africa provided the only possibility of preserving the Schütztruppen as a viable fighting force. Ammunition for rifles, machine guns, and artillery, was running low. The remaining supply of quinine would last the Germans for only one more month after which the Europeans would inevitably fall victim to malaria. By reducing the Schütztruppen's fighting strength to 300 Europeans, 1700 Askari, and 3,000 carriers von Lettow-Vorbeck traded size for military effectiveness.[102]. Those Europeans and askari who were not selected for the invasion of Portuguese East Africa remained behind waiting for the British and their impending internment. As the invasion force consumed its supplies, carriers fell out and remained behind in order to lessen the logistical burden on the remainder of the force. It was with this mindset that von Lettow-Vorbeck commenced the German invasion of Portuguese East Africa on November 25, 1917.

With the invasion of Portuguese East Africa, von Lettow-Vorbeck was forced to embrace even more closely tactics normally associated with guerilla warfare. Each operation constituted an effort to acquire supplies needed to sustain the force; self-defense remained the only other reason to engage in combat. Offensive capability within the Schütztruppen barely existed; maneuver now constituted von Lettow-Vorbeck's primary advantage. For the remainder of the war, Allied forces would continue to pursue the Schützstruppen down one side of Portuguese East Africa and back up the other. Over the next nine months British and German forces traversed over 1,500 miles while conducting this pursuit. On September 28, 1918 von Lettow-Vorbeck re-entered German East Africa and subsequently invaded Northern Rhodesia. On November 25,

[102] von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, 224.

1918, two weeks after the armistice ending World War I was signed in Europe, von Lettow-Vorbeck marched his Schütztruppen into the village of Abercorn in Northern Rhodesia and surrendered his force to General Edwards thus fulfilling the armistice obligations of the German government. Von Lettow-Vorbeck remained, at the end of it all, undefeated on the field of battle.

While von Lettow-Vorbeck utilized tactics associated with the guerilla, his aim was to preserve the Schütztruppen, not to ferment revolution. Hew Strachan concludes his analysis of von Lettow-Vorbeck by noting "He himself appeared a guerrilla because his interpretation of colonialism was contrasting, not congruent; for Lettow, in the last analysis, Germany's African claims resided not in the preservation of land but in the unity of the Schütztruppen themselves. In a war redolent with eighteenth-century parallels, it was perhaps appropriate that the heirs of Frederickian Prussia should still interpret the army as the embodiment of the state."[103]

In the final phase of the East African Campaign, von Lettow-Vorbeck's plans embodied all of the aspects of traditional African warfare. To preserve the Schütztruppen von Lettow-Vorbeck utilized raids to control people and resources. By making the decision to reduce the size of his force and include only the most physically able and combat ready personnel prior to invading Portuguese East Africa, he acted consistently with the African tradition of using numerically smaller forces. Logistically, von Lettow-Vorbeck could not have adopted a more basic structure. They carried what they must, and lived off of the enemy and the land where they could.

The British, conversely, demonstrated far less adherence to the traditional principles of African warfare. Their forces remained large and grew increasingly larger. The manpower required for the Carrier Corps to provide the necessary logistical support for the ever increasing combat forces decimated the economic and social fabric of East Africa. Territorial ambition continued to sound a siren call to occupy land instead of vigorously pursuing the enemy. All of

[103] Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 184.

these factors hindered the British military offensives and thereby facilitated the continued existence of the Schütztruppen.

Conclusion

With the cessation of hostilities on November 13, 1914, the East African Campaign effectively came to an end after 1,559 days. The immense destruction inflicted upon the land, the indescribable suffering shared by the African people, and the undermining of long standing social structures ensured that East Africa was as irrevocably changed in late 1918 as the European continent that had spawned the madness of the preceding four years. Much of the suffering that ensued was a direct consequence of European efforts to wage war on the African continent in a European way. Ultimately the fighting in East Africa became characterized by considerable mobility, relatively small unit engagements, and logistical nightmares despite extensive efforts by the British to mitigate many of these constraints. British efforts to overcome the environment consistently failed thereby resulting in significantly reduced British success. Great Britain and her allies proved unable to subjugate German forces because they failed to account for and adapt to the effects of the local environment.

That all of the British commanders who fought in East Africa faced an opponent of outstanding talent in von Lettow-Vorbeck is not disputed. Nevertheless, the British consistently snubbed success by insisting on fighting in a more conventional manner. Organizationally, the consolidated organizational structure inherent in battalion, regimental, and brigade organizations conflicted with the decentralized nature of combat in East Africa. The organizational structure characterized by the German Feldkompanie proved much more effective when exercised in the East African bush. It was more responsive, it was easier to command and control, and it was easier to resupply. Despite these advantages, the British by and large failed to adopt a smaller and more decentralized organization. Why? One reason was that doing so meant forgoing what was considered one of the British strengths: mass. In combat, numbers matter. It allows a force to

produce more firepower and take greater casualties while remaining combat effective. Larger forces, however, also generate greater requirements, primarily in the areas of communications and logistics.

Within the East African context, communication remained consistently problematic for all participants, as did logistics. The distances involved and the environment both mitigated against effective communications. Messengers became easily lost, killed, or captured. Wooden telegraph poles were devoured by terminates and telegraph wires not sufficiently high enough often fell victim to migrant giraffes. Controlling large forces in the bush remained a maddening exercise for all involved. Sometimes coordinated, decentralized execution could be attained but centralized control consistently proved elusive. This reality favored von Lettow-Vorbeck's more decentralized Schütztruppen and consistently worked against British efforts to coordinate efforts between its larger forces.

Logistics emerged as the most contentious and persistent issue facing both German and the British forces. The dearth of reliable infrastructure precluded the movement of significant amounts of supplies for all parties. For the rapidly expanding British forces this limitation became increasingly more restrictive. While command of the sea facilitated the transport of supplies into East African ports, it did nothing to facilitate the distribution of those supplies once on the continent. While von Lettow-Vorbeck's more nimble forces could live off of the land in most cases, the British, with a much larger force proved unable to sustain itself in an environment characterized by subsistence farming. This therefore necessitated the movement of supplies inland from the coast. The physical terrain, brutal and unforgiving, constituted a severe impediment to this British requirement. Only by impressing ever increasing numbers of Africans to serve as carriers could the British sustain their supply chain. By the end of the war, this practice of conscripting Africans to serve as porters by the British, Germans, and Belgians effectively destroyed what little agricultural productivity remained in the region.

By failing to acknowledge the limitations imposed by the environment, the Europeans effectively chose to fight the environment in addition to their declared adversaries. The Germans, lacking the advantages enjoyed by the British, adjusted to these environmental constraints much more readily. The British enjoyed greater numbers of troops, more robust logistics, and unchallenged control of the sea lines of communications. Nevertheless, by using their material advantages to attempt to overcome the environment instead of operating in a manner that acknowledged its constraints, the British operated much less efficiently. The greatest obstacle to British victory was not the Schütztruppen, nor was it the environment; the greatest obstacle for the British was the British themselves.

Warfare evolved in Africa as it did because of the environment. Small forces were utilized because the population was disproportionately small relative to the overall land mass and because the land simply could not sustain large concentrations of people. People and resources emerged as the focus of African warfare because they were more valuable than the land itself due to the relative availability of land. Raids became the most prevalent form of warfare because of the two previously identified factors. Attacking with a small group, seizing people or resources, and then retiring before the aggrieved can retaliate makes sense within the environmental context; attacking and holding relatively less valuable ground while waiting for an adversary to counterattack is nonsensical. Limiting logistical requirements constitutes a dependable means to limit one's adversaries, as this will help ensure that one does not unnecessarily exacerbate the struggle against the environment while simultaneously fighting the enemy.

The British inclination to fight the East African Campaign in a European manner continued well into 1917 and never fully abated. The British did not overcome their aversion to using African soldiers in significant quantities until 1917, a prejudice that significantly hindered their war fighting effort. The British Army and the Indian Army proved ill suited to sustained combat in East Africa. South African forces demonstrated marginally better performance but overall the South Africans fared little better in East Africa than did the others. The Germans,

deprived of ready reinforcement from the Fatherland, effectively had no other option than to utilize local askari. Battlefield results and causality counts indicate that the Schütztruppen were better off for it.

The African soldier during the East African Campaign from 1914-1918, on both the German and British sides, demonstrated levels of competence and determination that place them amongst the very best in the military pantheon. Their courage, skill, sacrifice, and physical and mental toughness constitute essential elements in a remarkable aspect of history that remains much underappreciated. Only with the expansion of the KAR in 1917 and the relentless British pursuit of the Schütztruppen in 1918 were the British able to become truly ascendant over von Lettow-Vorbeck's Schütztruppen. Only when the British began to operate within the constraints imposed by the environment were they able to achieve results that remotely approached decisive.

While one must exercise a high degree of caution when examining contemporary conflicts through the prism of history, certain parallels emerge particularly regarding the United States' current operations in Afghanistan. In East Africa the British made the decision to fight their forces as they were organized at the time with little regard for the environment's effect on such a force. Their failure to consider the effects of the environment manifested itself in sub-optimal performance. Considering these conclusions, the current force structure employed in Afghanistan merits additional study particularly as it relates to the mixture of heavy and light combat forces. Given the land locked, mountainous, and rugged nature of the terrain, the effects of the environment upon our force structure deserve greater scrutiny. The utilization of heavy and mechanized units in mountainous terrain against a light and fast moving enemy, particularly given their disproportionately high logistical requirements in an area characterized by limited (and long) lines of communication, seems counterintuitive. Based on the findings of this research, the synchronization of organizational design with environmental constraints constitutes a subject that warrants additional research. Ensuring that we utilize our resources in a manner that minimizes the fight against nature remains imperative; simply employing our forces according to

our force generation models, regardless of the environmental effects, will likely lead to less than optimal outcomes. When contemplating these contemporary issues, the British experience in East Africa during World War I provides lessons that should not be discounted, for despite all of their advantages, they failed to achieve victory against a capable and determined enemy in a hostile and brutal land.

APPENDIX I – Postscript to Sergeant Dan Fewster's Journal

Joseph Daniel Fewster served in the British Army as an artillery sergeant in both France and East Africa. His journal postscript provides an interesting perspective regarding the contrast between combat in France and combat in East Africa. Sergeant Dan Fewster of the 1st Hull Heavy Battery writes:

"I have often been asked which of the two campaigns that I have been in was the more difficult. I have always replied that it was the East Africa one. This answer seems to surprise everyone who was not in East Africa for any length of time. I think two years in the field in East Africa was about the limit of a soldier's endurance. The shortage and poorness of the rations, the scarcity of water, the long daily treks in terrible heat told its inevitable tale.

Malaria, Blackwater, enteric fevers and dysentery were rampant, to say nothing about such things as Veldt sores which covered men from head to foot with sores that almost made him frantic. Just imagine marching 20 or 24 miles in a temperature of 120 degrees in the shade, if you could find any. Before you started, your water bottle was filled and if you did not strike water that night, you had no more until the next morning. Thirst is a terrible thing and it is under these conditions that one finds this out. In France, you could always quench your thirst within an hour or so.

Also, I sincerely believe that all the flying and crawling insects in the world make East Africa their playground. They worry you by day and devour you by night. But perhaps the worst thing of all was the scarcity of news from home. The Field Post Office was in the hands of Indian staff. Whether they were careless and did not trouble to send the mail down the line, I do not know. I do know that a great number of my letters went astray. If one received a letter within three months of it being posted, one could count oneself extremely fortunate. I was once about 10 months without news from home, although my wife and daughter were writing every week. This is very trying when one knows that one's family lives in an area that is constantly being raided by German aircraft. In France, we usually received letters seven or eight days after posting.

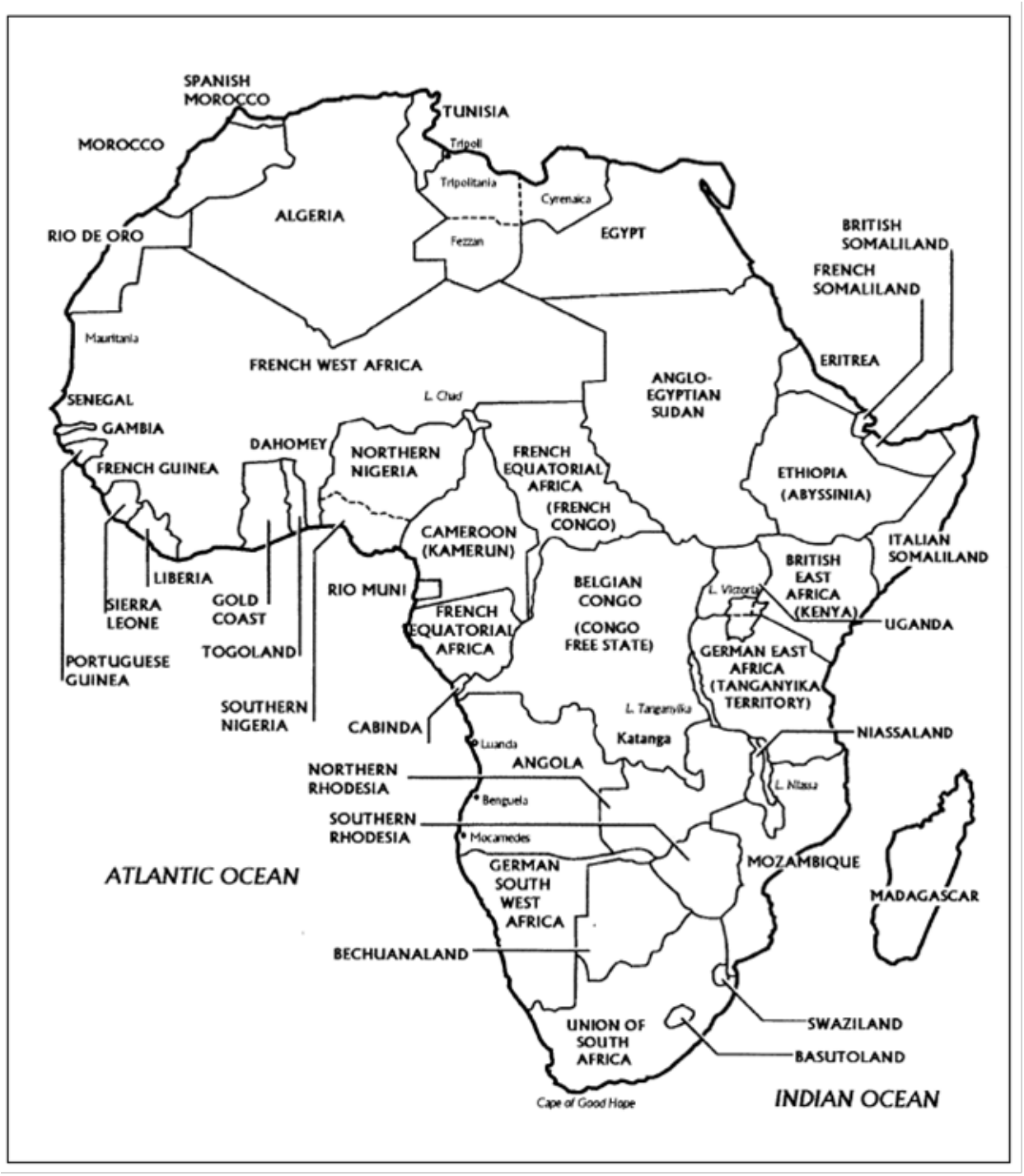
I freely admit that there was much more metal flying about in France and that there was a lot of gas, which was unknown in East Africa, but then one had good food and a decent supply of it. The climate was more congenial to our natures. One had spells off duty when things were a bit cushy. In France, one was troubled by only one kind of insect, not dozens of different species. And again, France was a civilised country, and East Africa, away from the larger towns was not. I would sooner hear a big shell travelling along like an express train, than hear a lion roar a few yards away. I have heard both very often, but a shell never made my flesh run up my spine until it turned my hair into pin wire.

If the same terrible time was to come again, and I had my choice, I should choose the civilised country. But let us trust that these times will never return. The whole affair is in the hands of the politicians, so let them make it impossible for a nation to run amok through the world again."[104]

[104] The Journals of Dan Fewster, http://www.jfhopkin.karoo.net/DanFewster/Postscript.html (accessed September 22, 2009).

APPENDIX II – Maps

Figure 1. Africa in 1914 on the Eve of World War I

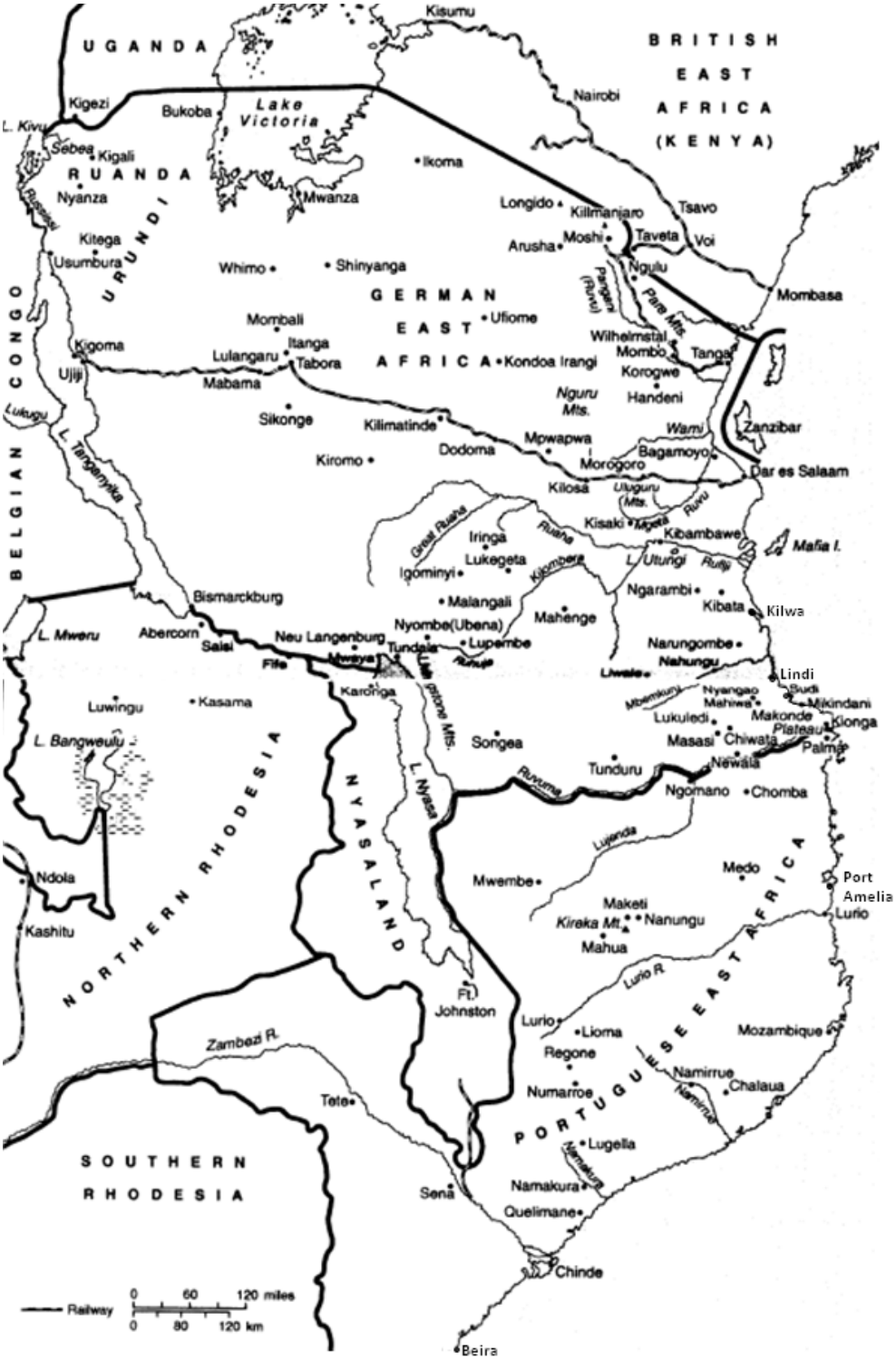


Source: J.P. Cann, *Mozambique, German East Africa and the Great War* (Small Wars and Insurgencies, 21 January 2001) 115.

Figure 2. East Africa: North Eastern Region

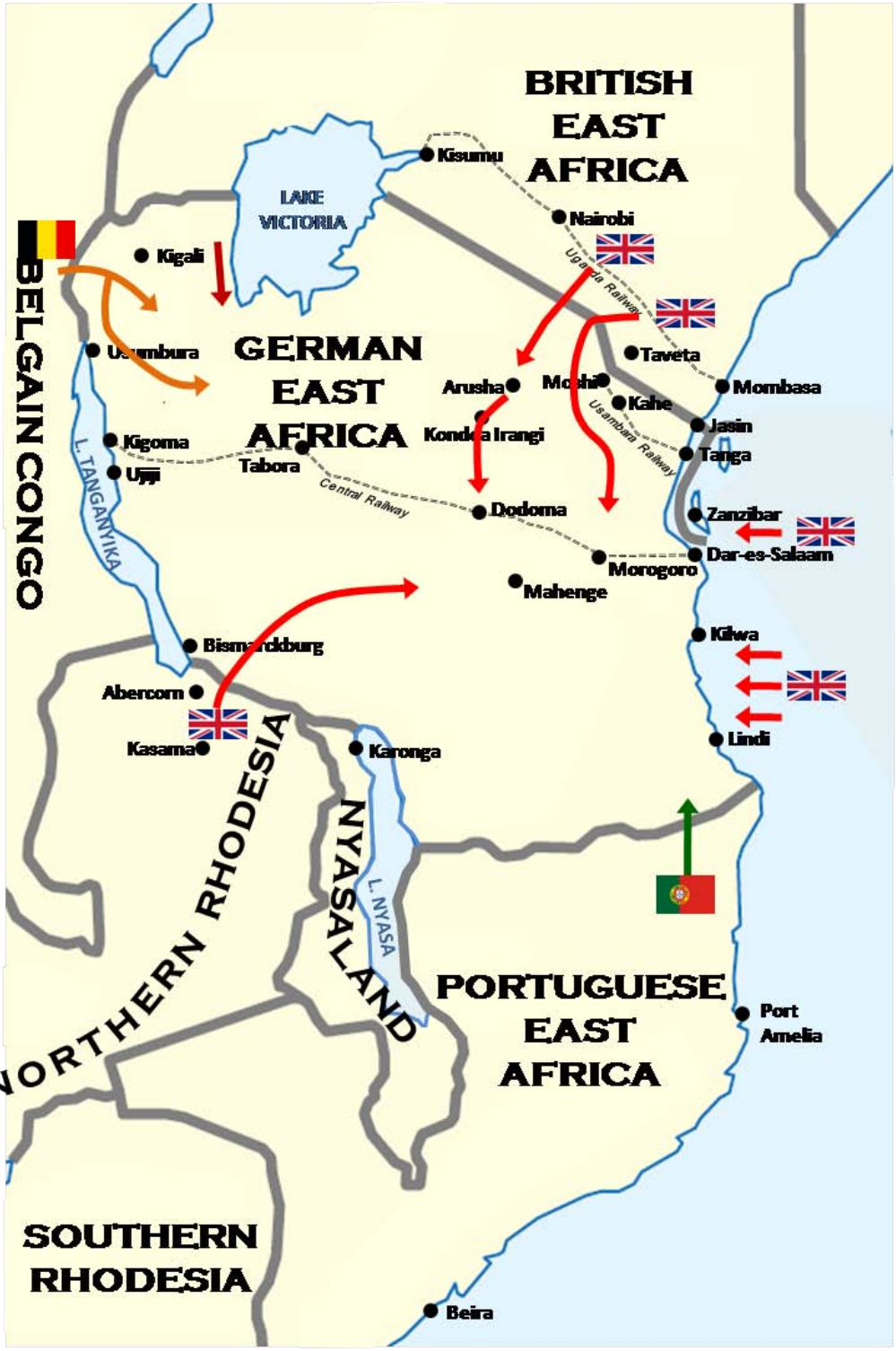
Source: Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 94-95.

Figure 3. East Africa



Source: Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 123.

Figure 4. Major General van Deventer's 1917 Offensive Concept



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